

Election 2012: How the Congressional Anti-Muslim Caucus Fared

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Council on American-Islamic Relations
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There is no formal anti-Muslim caucus, but several current and aspiring members of Congress are known for their Islamophobic views.

Prior to the election, CAIR identified eleven members of Congress who make repeated use of biased themes regarding Muslims. The anti-Muslim caucus is now seven members of the U.S. House and one member of the U.S. Senate.

Four of its members—Rep. Allen West (R-FL), Rep. Sue Myrick (R-NC), Rep. Chip Cravaack (R-MN) and Rep. Joe Walsh (R-IL)—will not be returning for Congress's 113th session. One new member, Senator-elect Ted Cruz (R-TX), joins the group.

West and Myrick counted among the four key members of the caucus. The other two, Reps. King (R-NY) and Bachmann (R-MN), won their respective re-election bids. Bachmann won with a margin of less than two percent.

U.S. House

Rep. Allen West (R-FL)

West's (R-FL) loss is the biggest news regarding Islamophobia in elected office. West claims that Islam is not a religion and that Muslims are a "fifth column" in America. Rep. West has asserted that Islam is "a totalitarian theocratic political ideology, it is not a religion."ⁱ He also called Islam a "very vile and very vicious enemy that we have allowed to come in this country." He will no longer be making those claims as a member of Congress. This also means that hate groups such as Citizens for National Security and ACT! for America will no longer have West offering them a legitimizing platform in the halls of congress.

Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-MN)

Bachmann won by less than two percent of the votes cast. In 2011, Bachmann fed into the conspiracy theory that sharia, or Islamic religious principles, may replace the Constitution, saying its consideration in American courts "would usurp, and put Sharia law over the Constitution, and that would be wrong."ⁱⁱ In 2012, she led a McCarthy-like campaign that sought to portray essentially any Muslim in public service as an infiltrator worthy of suspicion. Islamophobe Frank Gaffney, a leading proponent of government interference in Islamic religious practices, admitted spending "hours, over several days" with Bachmann briefing her on his anti-Muslim conspiracies.ⁱⁱⁱ

Rep. Peter King (R-NY)

King easily defeated his opponent. In early 2011, Rep. King implied that American Muslims are not "American" when it comes to protecting our nation during times of war:^{iv} "When a war begins, we're all Americans. But in this case, this is not the situation. And whether it's pressure, whether it's cultural tradition, whatever, the fact is the Muslim community does not cooperate anywhere near to the extent that it should. The irony is that we're living in two different worlds." King held a series of five anti-Muslim hearings that was opposed by a broad spectrum of community groups. According to an analysis conducted by CAIR, the hearings had the

ultimate effect of disproving King's two main allegations against American Muslims.¹

Rep. Sue Myrick (R-NC)

Myrick retired. In 2009, she famously held a press conference accusing young American Muslims who were interning on Capitol Hill of being spies and infiltrators. In 2003, she advised looking at a potential national security threat coming from convenience stores saying, "You know, look at who runs all the convenience stores across the country. Every little town you go into, you know?"

Rep. Paul Broun (R-GA)

Broun ran unopposed. In 2011, Broun (R-GA) expressed his exasperation when "a guy in Arabian dress" did not receive secondary screening in an airport.² He also once hosted notorious Islamophobe David Yerushalmi at a Capitol Hill briefing on Islamic religious principles. Yerushalmi heads an organization that once offered a policy proposal that would make "adherence to Islam" punishable by 20 years in prison. Yerushalmi authored the model anti-Islam legislation that was introduced in numerous states in 2011 and 2012.

Rep. Renee Ellmers (R-NC)

Ellmers (R-NC) won her race. In 2012, an Ellmers ad used the terms "the Muslims" and "the terrorists" interchangeably. The ad implied that the Park 51 Muslim community center is a "victory mosque" celebrating the 9/11 attacks. In the ad, Ellmers said, "The terrorists haven't won and we should tell them in plain English: No, there will never be a mosque at Ground Zero."

Rep. Chip Cravaack (R-MN)

The freshman lost his seat. During one of Rep. Peter King's anti-Muslim hearings, Cravaack called one of America's most prominent, mainstream Muslim organizations "a terrorist organization."

Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ)

Franks won. He signed onto the Bachmann-led campaign to exclude Muslims from public service by labeling them infiltrators. He also participated in Rep. Sue Myrick's press conference that attempted to label Muslim congressional interns as spies. Franks promotes the Islamophobia movement's go-to Muslim, Zuhdi Jasser. This includes penning a joint opinion piece that was published in the Washington Times on May 13, 2012. Jasser is known for narrating anti-Muslim films, such as *The Third Jihad*, and supporting unconstitutional legislation restricting the religious rights of Muslims.

Rep. Louis Gohmert (R-TX)

The man who brought us "terror babies" returns to congress to dream up freshly swaddled conspiracy theories.

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA)

Wolf will return to congress.

¹ See CAIR's "Rep. Peter King's anti-Muslim hearings: eight years, four hearings, eighteen witnesses, and no support for his longstanding allegations against American Muslims" Available at: <http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/King-Hearings-final.pdf>

Rep. Joe Walsh (R-IL)

Walsh was defeated. When a town hall meeting attendee told Rep. Joe Walsh (R-IL) that he was “looking for some godly men and women in the Senate, in the Congress, who will stand in the face of the danger of Islam,” Walsh left the door open for suspicion of every Muslim living in certain parts of Illinois when he responded saying radical Islam is more of a threat “now that it was right after 9/11” and “It’s here. It’s in Elk Grove. It’s in Addison. It’s in Elgin. It’s here.”

U.S. Senate

Senator-elect Ted Cruz (R-TX)

Declaring “Sharia law is an enormous problem,” Cruz advanced the conspiracy theory that Islamic religious principles, or sharia, can somehow supplant the U.S. Constitution.^{vi} In reality, the First Amendment prohibits government establishing any religion, let alone one practiced by around one percent of the U.S. population, as superior to others in this nation.

Other Races of Note

Aspiring caucus member, Florida Republican Adam Hasner will not be able to bring his love of Islamophobes like Dutch politician Geert Wilders and the Islamophobia movement’s caustic mouthpiece Pam Geller to the Hill. In Arkansas, Rep. James McLean defeated Republican Charlie Fuqua, a candidate who advocated the deportation of all Muslims in a self-published book.

Arizona Republican Congressional candidate Gabriela Saucedo Mercer also lost. Mercer believes, “If you know Middle Easterners, a lot of them, they look Mexican or they look, you know, like a lot of people in South America, dark skin, dark hair, brown eyes. And they mix. They mix in. And those people, their only goal in life is to, to cause harm to the United States. So why do we want them here, either legally or illegally?”^{vii}

ⁱ Think Progress video “Allen West on Islam,” accessed January 6, 2012.

Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Sz21ekZ8aM>

ⁱⁱ Russell Goldman. “Bachmann Opposed to Sharia Law, Says it Usurps Constitution, ABC News, November 2, 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tim Murphy. “Look Who’s Advising Michele Bachmann on Foreign Policy,” Mother Jones, August 1, 2011.

^{iv} Peter King interview on Secure Freedom Radio with Frank Gaffney, January 6, 2011.

^v Keith Laing. GOP Lawmaker: I saw TSA pat down a ‘little old lady,’ child but not Arab man,” The Hill, May 25, 2011.

^{vi} Andrew Kirell. “Tea Party Senate Candidate Ted Cruz Fear-Mongers: ‘Sharia Law Is an Enormous Problem,’” mediaite.com, July 9, 2012.

Available at: <http://www.mediaite.com/online/tea-party-senate-candidate-ted-cruz-fear-mongers-sharia-law-is-an-enormous-problem/>

^{vii} Nick Martin. “Arizona GOP Favorite Doesn’t Want Middle Easterners In U.S. ‘Legally Or Illegally,’” Talking Points Memo, August 28, 2012.

Available at: http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2012/08/gabriela_saucedo_mercer_middle_easterners.php?ref=fpb